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Communism and Memory Politics in the European Union

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ABSTRACT

This article assesses the potential for memory of communism to become part of the EU's memory culture by comparing three contrasting case studies: the Baltic States, Hungary and Germany. It argues that, rather than the emergence of a western European memory culture which is challenged by a uniform eastern memory culture within the EU, as some commentators have claimed, the different positions of EU member states tend to be conditioned by a range of domestic and international factors. In terms of the promotion of the memory of communism within the EU, these factors can vary significantly from state to state, demonstrating the continued dominance of the national frame in the mobilisation of historical memory.

KEY WORDS

memory, European Union, communism, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia

As Bo Stråth has observed, the project of European unification since the Cold War has increasingly been concerned with issues of identity.¹ The attempt to define a common historical memory has been central to these debates, with the National Socialist genocide against Europe's Jews playing a key role in the European Union's memory politics. With the expansion of the EU to former communist countries, however, these new member states have pressed for the inclusion of the memory of communist dictatorship in a common European memory, under the umbrella of an 'anti-totalitarian' memory which condemns both fascism and Stalinism alike.

¹Bo Stråth, 'A European Identity: To the Historical Limits of a Concept', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5.4 (2002), 387-401 (p. 388).

This activism on the part of European politicians from post-communist member states, and by the national governments of those states, will be examined in detail below. It raises two important questions for understanding the memory politics of the European Union today. Firstly, it is necessary to understand what motivates such activism. Secondly, it is important to assess the extent to which these states' promotion of an 'anti-totalitarian' memory politics in the EU is likely to succeed given the well-established pre-dominance of remembrance of National Socialism and the Holocaust as points of moral orientation for the Union and its members. As I will demonstrate below, these two questions are in fact very much interconnected, in that the particular motivations of the post-communist member states to insist upon the parity of memories reveals not just divergent historical experiences which militate against consensus on a shared history, but also concrete national interests and nation-specific domestic political struggles which inform the option for one version of history or another. Therefore, although post-communist member states increasingly appeal to the European level to promote commemoration of communist crimes, I will argue that their reasons for doing so remain rooted in the national context. This will be demonstrated with regard to case studies of the Baltic states and Hungary, which will be contrasted with the case of Germany as one of the core western European member states, in order to demonstrate how differing national interests and domestic political situations shape individual states' readiness to accept 'anti-totalitarian' memory as opposed to the established European memory of the Holocaust. These three cases studies are chosen for their diversity, in order to demonstrate how conditions at the national level motivate different responses to a supposedly shared European past.

In examining such national interests and taking into account internal political divisions, I will offer a more complex picture of the search for a place for communism in European memory than has hitherto been considered. Previous analyses have tended to assume that a common front of post-communist member states promoting memory of communism at the EU level indicates a common

set of motivations. For example, both Carlos Closa Montero² and Maria Mälksoo³ have understood this phenomenon in terms of a search for recognition within the EU on the part of central and eastern European states, who feel themselves reduced to junior partners, required to take on the values of the pre-2004 member states as expressed in the latter's view of history. Or, as Mälksoo puts it, the central and eastern European states are 'rebellious against the Western European rendering of their own mnemonic culture as obligatory for all others' and challenging 'the long-term tendency of the old Western core of the EU to act as a model for the whole of Europe'.⁴

Alternatively, voices from the Left and from Israel join together, for entirely different reasons, in regarding the promotion of memory of communism in the EU as an attempt to side-step an engagement with National Socialism. For example, writing in the *Times of Israel* in March 2012, the Director of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, Jerusalem, Efraim Zuroff, has described the Prague Declaration (discussed below) and related initiatives as an attempt by eastern and central European nations to avoid dealing honestly 'with their Holocaust crimes', transforming themselves from 'perpetrator nations into countries of victims'.⁵ Writing from a communist perspective, on the other hand, British author Phil Katz sees attempts to commemorate human rights abuses in the Soviet bloc as a conspiracy of the Right to discredit socialist alternatives in the future, while at the same time diverting attention from the historical legacy of their own ideology.⁶ In a similar vein, French Left intellectual Régine Robin, in the context of a seminar series organised by Germany's Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, describes what she sees as the EU's support for the anti-communist agenda in central and eastern Europe as offering support to the whitewashing of many new member states' previous complicity in fascism.⁷ While these motivations are undoubtedly present to some extent in debates around the commemoration of the communist past in central and eastern Europe, the

²Carlos Closa Montero, 'Politics of Memory: What is the Role for the EU?', in *Europe 70 Years after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact*, ed. by European Parliament (Vilnius, 2009), pp. 111-31.

³Maria Mälksoo, 'The Memory Politics of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns and the Collective Memory of Europe', *European Journal of International Relations*, 15 (2009), 653-680.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 672.

⁵Efraim Zuroff, 'Why Joachim Gauck is Wrong for Germany', *Times of Israel*, 22 March 2012. Available at: <http://www.timesofisrael.com/why-joachim-gauck-is-wrong-for-germany/> (accessed 25 October 2012).

⁶Phil Katz, *Freedom From Tyranny: The Fight Against Fascism and the Falsification of History* (London, 2010), p. 102.

⁷Régine Robin, 'Das Verschwinden der DDR im kollektiven Gedächtnis', in *Vom kritischen Gebrauch der Erinnerung*, ed. by Thomas Flierl and Elfriede Müller (Berlin, 2009) pp. 49-66 (pp. 50-52).

approach of these commentators is essentially monocausal, failing to take into account nation-specific differences which colour these engagements with history. These analyses seek a catch-all explanation for the promotion of memory of communism by post-2004 member states at the EU level, ignoring the significant variations in approaches to the past which, for example, Stefan Troebst has observed.⁸ Rather than pit a homogenous western European memory against a homogenous eastern European memory, I argue, close examination of individual case studies will help to show how, in terms of the motivations for promoting one form or another of European memory, the national frame still very much matters.

The Development of European Memory Politics

The potential foundations of a European identity attached specifically to the EU and its institutions are various and highly contested. While some argue for the power of citizenship rights in promoting a sense of identification with the EU, others point to the potential power of a presumed shared culture or even a shared religious heritage, as in the Vatican's campaign to have Christianity incorporated into the failed EU constitution.⁹ Increasingly, however, it is history that the EU has identified as a potentially unifying factor: a trend evidenced, for example, by the European Parliament's decision in 2008 to fund a museum called the House of European History in Brussels, to open in 2014. As Claus Leggewie points out, the actual contents of the museum remain shrouded in a certain amount of mystery.¹⁰ However, a sceptical British newspaper report notes that the likely

⁸Stefan Troebst, 'Jalta versus Stalingrad, Gulag versus Holocaust: Konfligierende Erinnerungskulturen im größeren Europa', *Berliner Journal für Soziologie*, 15.3 (2005), 381-400.

⁹For an overview of these debates, see Martin Kohli, 'The Battlegrounds of European Identity', *European Societies*, 2.2 (2010), 113-137. On the Vatican's campaign, see Marcin Frydrych, 'Vatican regrets absence of Christianity in EU Constitution', *EUobserver*, 21 June 2004. Available at: <http://euobserver.com/institutional/16686> (accessed 22 November 2012).

¹⁰Claus Leggewie, *Der Kampf um die europäische Erinnerung. Ein Schlachtfeld wird besichtigt* (Munich, 2011), p. 185.

starting point for the exhibition's chronology will be 1946, since the member states have difficulty in agreeing on how the Second World War in particular would be represented and interpreted.¹¹

That the Second World War should be perceived as a sticking-point for such a project is symptomatic of the current state of memory politics in the EU. In parallel with the EU's attempts to come to terms with its identity dilemma since the end of the Cold War, we have also seen the emergence of commemoration of the Second World War, and specifically of the genocide against Europe's Jews, as a touchstone not just for European memory culture, but also for a globalized agenda of human rights and post-conflict justice. While Daniel Levy and Nathan Sznajder's hope may not have been realised that the memory of the Holocaust would become the standard against which every state's actions in respect of human rights would be judged by the international community,¹² it is nevertheless the case that, at least in western Europe, the US and Australasia, the Holocaust, and the notion of genocide for which it provides the original definition, has now become a privileged analogy through which Western nations and their related public spheres think about and relate to both historical human rights abuses and contemporary crises. And this even if, as Peter Novick demonstrates, the invocation of Holocaust memory by no means guarantees appropriate humanitarian intervention in any particular case.¹³

The early 2000s, as the EU moved closer to its expansion to the east, were marked by increased levels of activity among governments in the 'old' member states to cement the significance of Holocaust as a common European memory. For Cecile Felicia Stockholm Banke, these efforts can

¹¹*Daily Mail*, 'Row Brewing as Cost of New Brussels History Museum Soars'. 6 April 2011. Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/article-1373596/Brussels-House-Of-European-History-museum-Row-brewing-escalating-costs.html#ixzz29l3V016t> (accessed 19 October 2012). Judging by the recently published brochure for the project, however, the scope of exhibition is likely to reach back as far as the 19th century. European Parliament, *Building a House of European History* (Luxembourg, 2013) (Available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/visiting/ressource/static/files/building-a-house-of-european-history_e-v.pdf (accessed 10 February 2014)).

¹²Daniel Levy and Nathan Sznajder, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia, 2006).

¹³Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York, 2000).

be directly linked to ‘the need for shared values within the EU’ as it faced enlargement.¹⁴ In many western European nations, the 1970s and 1980s had seen a reappraisal of old myths of national victimhood and resistance to National Socialism which had sustained those nations’ material and moral recovery after World War II.¹⁵ This process had not only been driven by political elites. Indeed, it had often involved activism by citizens to uncover and commemorate the extent of the nation’s complicity: as, for example, in the excavation of the former Gestapo headquarters in Berlin.¹⁶ Where politicians did seek to determine appropriate forms of commemoration, they often had to contend with the criticism of activists for not going far enough in their assumption of guilt, as in the debates around the Vel’ d’Hiv memorial in Paris.¹⁷ Even in the United Kingdom, whose territory had (largely) not been occupied, and whose population had therefore not been forced to choose between collaboration and resistance, issues such as the legitimacy of the campaigns of Bomber Command meant that the fight against Nazism was no longer simply a source of positive identification. At the same time, as the witnesses to the Holocaust became fewer in number, the need to preserve the memory of the Holocaust was perceived as increasingly pressing. Yet the task of preserving that memory fell not only to governments and activists, but was also taken up in highly effective ways by the mass media, from the American television series *Holocaust* (1979), which has been credited with opening up the debate about the genocide against Europe’s Jews both in Germany and further afield,¹⁸ to Hollywood productions such as Steven Spielberg’s Oscar-winning *Schindler’s List* (1993), to name only one of the most prominent films on the subject.

Drawing on this increased prominence of the Holocaust in the public sphere, European institutions implemented a series of measures throughout the 1990s in order to secure the status of the genocide

¹⁴Cecile Felicia Stokholm Banke, *The Legacies of the Holocaust and European Identity after 1989* (Copenhagen, 2009). Available at: http://www.diis.dk/graphics/Publications/WP2009/WP2009-36_Legacies_holocaust_european_identity_web.pdf (accessed 24 October 2012)

¹⁵Emmanuel Droit, ‘Le Goulag contre le Shoah: Mémoires officielles et cultures mémorielles dans l’Europe élargie’, *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire*, 94 (2007), 101-120 (pp. 103-104); Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London, 2010), pp. 808-809.

¹⁶Karen E. Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis, 2005), pp. 65-67.

¹⁷Peter Carrier, *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory. France and Germany since 1989* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 60-67.

¹⁸Judt, p. 811.

against Europe's Jews as a cornerstone of European memory culture. In 1995, for example, the European Parliament proposed the institution of an EU-wide Holocaust Memorial Day. This project (later realised through UN Resolution 60/7 in 2005) was taken up by the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust in 1998, a key intergovernmental initiative which led to the setting up of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. A nominally international, yet primarily European affair, the work of the Taskforce is premised on the status of the Holocaust as a unique historical event whose commemoration offers lessons for the future in terms of the global defence of human rights. In the words of the Stockholm Declaration: 'the unprecedented character of the Holocaust will always hold universal meaning'. In this sense, the Stockholm Declaration draws on the now dominant paradigm of Holocaust scholarship, which starts from the premise of the genocide against Europe's Jews as an ontologically unique event.¹⁹ There is, of course, a paradox here, in that the Holocaust is presented both as an event unlike any other, but also as the measure by which Europeans are called upon to respond to other events which echo, but can never be the same as, the Holocaust itself. This paradox became particularly acute during the accession processes which led to the expansion of the EU to the east in 2004. Post-communist nations which were themselves emerging from a long history of dictatorship were required to sign up to a Holocaust-centric EU memory agenda as proof of their democratic credentials, to the extent that Emmanuel Droit has spoken of the 'Copenhagen memory criteria' as a kind of moral adjunct to the formal criteria for EU accession.²⁰

The period since the 2004 enlargement has been marked, however, by attempts among the new, post-communist member states in eastern and central Europe to influence the EU's memory agenda in favour of an anti-totalitarian memory, commemorating both victims of fascism and communism, as opposed to a memory which focuses only on the Holocaust and its moral legacy. The pressure

¹⁹Jean-Michel Chaumont, *Die Konkurrenz der Opfer. Genozid, Identität, Anerkennung* (Lüneburg, 2001).

²⁰Droit, p. 103. Annabelle Littoz-Monnet has called acknowledgement of the primacy of Holocaust memory a 'soft entry criterion' for EU membership. Annabelle Littoz-Monnet, 'The EU Politics of Remembrance: Can Europeans Remember Together?', *West European Politics*, 35.5 (2012), 1182-1202 (p. 1182).

these states have brought to bear has not been without effect. For example, as a European Commission report to the Council and Parliament of 2010 documents,²¹ the EU's collective statements of intent on memory issues have been marked in recent years by an emphasis on a shared history of conflict to be overcome and, as in the Stockholm Programme of December 2009, the shared values of the EU, 'which are incompatible with crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes, including crimes committed by totalitarian regimes'.²²

Post-communist EU member states have made use of a number of the Union's institutions in order to promote this agenda. On 8 April 2008, the Slovene Presidency of the Council of the EU (January-June 2008) organised a public hearing on crimes committed by 'totalitarian regimes' in cooperation with the Commission, an initiative followed swiftly by a conference on the crimes of communism sponsored by the Senate of the Czech Republic. This conference led to the signing of the 'Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Memory', which demands that the communist regimes of Europe 'must inform all European minds to the same extent as the Nazi regime's crimes did.' The declaration was signed by a variety of anti-communist historians, former dissidents, right-wing politicians and representatives of state-funded memorial initiatives. The conference and the declaration were something of a curtain-raiser to the Czech Presidency of the Council of the Union (January-June 2009), which, while widely condemned as shambolic, was notable for its push to restrain Russian influence in the newly expanded EU's eastern neighbourhood.²³ As I will discuss below, fear of Russian influence among some post-communist EU member states is a not insignificant factor in the pressure to establish memory of communist dictatorship on a par with that

²¹European Commission, 'Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: The Memory of the Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regimes in Europe' (Brussels, 2010). Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/redirecting/pdf/com\(2010\)_873_1_en_act_part1_v61.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/redirecting/pdf/com(2010)_873_1_en_act_part1_v61.pdf) (accessed 31 October 2012)

²²Council of the European Union, 'The Stockholm Programme – An Open and Secure Europe Serving and Protecting Citizens', p. 3. Available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2010:115:0001:0038:en:PDF> (accessed 30 October 2012).

²³Andrew Rettmann, 'Czech Presidency Limpers off the Stage,' *EU Observer*, 30 June 2009. Available at: <http://euobserver.com/political/28398> (accessed 25 October 2012).

of the National Socialism, with Russia's apparent unwillingness to address the Stalinist past often linked to anti-democratic tendencies in the present.

Under the Czech Presidency, a second public hearing was convened, on 18 March 2009, which concluded with a call for the establishment of a 'Platform of European Memory and Conscience' and the institution of a 'Remembrance Day for Victims of Nazism and Totalitarian Communism on 23 August'.²⁴ By the end of that month, the European Parliament had voted to accept a motion tabled by parliamentarians from a number of post-communist member states which made the same demands as the Czech Presidency's hearing, and the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism was created. The day chosen for this commemoration, 23 August, is significant for the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the secret clauses of the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression treaty of 1939, which paved the way for the invasion and division of Poland by Germany and the Soviet Union. 2009 marked the seventieth anniversary of the pact, and was also the occasion of a conference organised under the auspices of the then President of the European Parliament, Polish MEP Jerzy Buzak, with the support of the Baltic states. Subsequently, the European Parliament has also played host to a conference on the Legal Settlement of Communist Crimes (June 2012), organised by the Platform of European Memory and Conscience. The Platform, called for at both the Czech Presidency's public hearing and in the European Parliament motion of 2009, was finally founded in October 2011, although not as an EU project: its work – producing educational materials and touring exhibitions to spread understanding of the crimes of communism throughout Europe – is in fact sponsored directly by the V4 Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic) rather than by the EU itself.²⁵

²⁴Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union (2009) 'European Conscience and Crimes of Totalitarian Communism.' Available at: http://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/tiskove_zpravy/slyseni-brusel-final-conclusions.pdf (accessed 21 November 2012).

²⁵Further details available at <http://www.memoryandconscience.eu/about-the-platfor> (accessed 21 November 2012).

Despite this wealth of activity at the European level, I argue that the meanings of and motivations for this promotion of ‘anti-totalitarian’ memory by central and eastern European member states can only be properly be understood when the conditions at the national level are considered. In order to do so, I will now to turn to my case studies, beginning with the Baltic states.

The Baltic States

The position of the Baltic states as EU members is fundamentally conditioned by their historical experience of being caught between larger European powers, particularly Russia and Germany. After having briefly achieved independence from Russia in 1917, the Nazi-Soviet pact opened the way for their annexation by the Soviet Union. Briefly re-occupied by Germany during the Second World War, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia were subject to Sovietization in the post-war period and only re-gained their independence in the early 1990s. With sizeable Russian populations and a powerful neighbour, the Baltic states have turned to western alliances within the EU and NATO ‘as ultimate guarantors of national sovereignty’.²⁶ In particular, in the wake of Baltic accession to the EU, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia have been disturbed to see Russia seeking to impose its influence on the EU’s eastern neighbourhood, especially given Russia’s move away from democracy and towards a more authoritarian style of politics under Putin. Russia’s desire for influence in central and eastern Europe is particularly a threat to the Baltic states’ energy policies, since they are reliant on Russian gas, yet have also been by-passed as a supply route for energy to the rest of Europe with the advent of the Nord Stream gas pipeline deal between Russia and Germany in 2005.²⁷ With reference to the energy situation, this association of Russia’s Soviet past and the politics of Putin is made explicit by prominent Lithuanian conservative, and signatory of the Prague Declaration, Vytautas Landsbergis, speaking at the European Parliament’s conference on the seventieth

²⁶David Galbreath, ‘From Nationalism to Nation-Building: Latvian Politics and Minority Policy’, *Nationalities Papers*, 34.4 (2006), 383-406 (p. 399).

²⁷Andres Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States* (Basingstoke, 2010), pp. 195-196.

anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact: ‘the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact is not out of business. You may ask where one can see it. Look inside the mentality of mutant Soviet communism turned into nationalism of today with preferences of its representatives to subjugate neighbouring territories again and again [sic]’.²⁸

As Andres Kasekamp observes, it is the interpretation of history which has become ‘the central battleground between the Baltic states and Russia’.²⁹ This serves three interconnected functions from the point of view of the Baltic states. Firstly, by stressing Russia’s hostile occupation of their countries and the suffering of their populations under Soviet rule, the Baltic states can present themselves as victims who deserve protection from the EU and other international organisations. Secondly, by accusing Russia of failing to come to terms adequately with the Stalinist past, a charge which is justified in many respects, it can underline the dangers of Russia power in the present. Implicitly, if Russia does not condemn communism and Stalin in particular in the present, it demonstrates that it may be willing to adopt a similar anti-democratic and imperialist stance, threatening the security of EU member states in central and eastern Europe. Thirdly, drawing attention to Russia’s misdeeds in the past and its current failures in coming to terms with its authoritarian past potentially provide a moral argument for the other EU states to support the Baltic states against Russia, given that the EU purports to defend democracy and human rights in the name of (anti-totalitarian) history.

This anti-Russian rhetoric has been played out in a number of spectacular disputes between the Baltic states over their shared history. For example, in April of 2007, a diplomatic conflict erupted between the Estonian government and the Russian Federation after the removal of the ‘Bronze Soldier’, the Soviet-era Monument to the Liberators of Tallinn, from the centre of the Estonian

²⁸Vytautas Landsbergis, ‘Address of Professor Vytautas Landsbergis’, in *Europe 70 Years after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact*, ed. by European Parliament (Vilnius, 2009), pp. 21-24 (p. 23).

²⁹Kasekamp, p. 196.

capital, along with the bodies of the unknown soldiers which flanked it. The monument was re-erected in an out-of-town cemetery, and the bodies re-interred, but this relocation led to riots in the capital by Russians and Estonian Russian-speakers, as well as to a war of words with Russia itself, whose foreign minister described the removal as an act of ‘blasphemy’ against the memory of Soviet forces.³⁰ For many Estonians, the Soviet memorial ‘symbolized their national tragedy’ and celebrated in the figure of a Soviet soldier ‘the organizer of deportations, a war criminal, a murderer’.³¹ However, it would be an over-simplification to present the debate over the statue as merely an expression of a unified Estonian desire for independence from Russian dominance. The controversy also had a domestic political dimension, in that it expressed a struggle for internal political dominance within Estonia itself, with parties of the Left, the Right and of the Russian minority taking up positions according to their own political agenda³² and attempting to make use of the conflict for their own ends.

This overlapping and interaction of domestic political issues with international tensions in the field of memory politics is a phenomenon which Jennifer Lind has pointed to in the very different context of Sino-Japanese relations.³³ Lind’s work reminds us that, when examining a nation’s pursuit of a particular memory agenda at the international level, we should bear in mind that this may also open up controversies in national politics. Conversely, as with Estonia’s relationship to the EU, we can see how such domestic issues can swiftly become a source of international tension, as when the European Parliament voted for a solidarity motion with Estonia in the wake of Russia’s criticism of the relocation of the ‘Bronze Soldier’ statue.³⁴

³⁰James Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution: Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe* (Yale, 2011), p. 117.

³¹Marko Lehti, Matti Jutila and Markku Jokisipilä, ‘Never-Ending Second World War: Public Performances of National Dignity and the Drama of the Bronze Soldier’, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 39.4 (2008), 393-418 (p. 398).

³²Mark, p. 117.

³³Jennifer Lind, *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics* (Ithaca and London, 2008), pp. 26-100.

³⁴Leggewie, p. 61.

A further flashpoint in Baltic-Soviet relations was the film *The Soviet Story* (2008), directed by Latvian Edvīns Šnore and sponsored by the UEN Group in the European Parliament. Somewhat paradoxically, we see here a Eurosceptic, conservative nationalist grouping within the Parliament making use of a European platform to call upon the EU to defend the rights of small nations like the Baltic states against Russian power. It was UEN members from the Baltic states who were at the forefront of promoting and, in some cases, appearing in the film, which charts the crimes of National Socialism and Stalinism both domestically and at war, making arguments for the comparability, if not identity, of the two ideologies. What is most striking about the film, however, is that the last ten minutes are devoted to an attack on Russia under Putin. Contemporary film of fascist groups in the Soviet Union committing assaults and murders is cut together with criticism of the Putin regime's promotion of a positive memory culture in relation to Stalin as the leader of the Great Patriotic War and Russia's general authoritarian turn. The European Union is also criticised for failing to press Moscow to pursue those who committed human rights abuses in the GULag: a result, as French conservative historian and co-author of *The Black Book of Communism* (1997) Nicholas Werth claims in the film, of the EU's dependence on Russian oil and gas. The voice-over of the film ends by informing readers that what characterised both Nazi and Stalinist ideology was a belief that some 'inferior' nations could be sacrificed in the name of progress, linking this commonality between fascism and communism to the EU's allegedly conciliatory stance towards Russia. Here, implicitly, the Baltic nations are placed back in their victim role, caught between the interests of more powerful nations.

The film was shown on Latvian state television in June of 2009 and was subsequently broadcast on Estonian state television to mark the memorial day of Juri Kukk, a political prisoner who died in Soviet detention.³⁵ The reaction from nationalist groups in Russia included the burning of an effigy of the film's director outside the Latvian embassy in Moscow and a threat by nationalist historian

³⁵*Baltic News Service*, 'Representation of European Commission in Estonia to Show The Soviet Story', 3 September 2009.

and columnist Alexander Dyukov to kill the director with his own hands.³⁶ Subsequently, Dyukov published a paper refuting alleged errors in the film's presentation of the facts and dismissing it as a politicised attack by Latvia on Russia: 'we shall not deny the fact of Soviet political repressions, a tragic chapter in our history. But we cannot agree with the outright lies of "The Soviet Story" – primarily because they are used by Latvian politicians to ignite hatred toward our country'.³⁷ The Russian state news agency also condemned the film as inaccurate and as a propagandistic attack against Russia,³⁸ while the Russian press contained speculation that this was merely 'revenge' for Russian state media's ongoing emphasis on the legacy of fascism in the Baltic states, including the film *The Baltic Nazism*, which was shown on Russian television in 2007.³⁹ However, criticism of the film was not only external to Latvia. Tatjana Ždanoka, who is a Latvian MEP of For Human Rights in United Latvia, a party representing the interests of the Russian-Latvian minority, described the film as a mouth-piece for right-wing Latvian politicians and their attacks on Russia.⁴⁰

The *Soviet Story* and 'Bronze Soldier' episodes demonstrate how the push for condemnation of the crimes of communism in the Baltic has both international and domestic dimensions. At the domestic level, such disputes are part of an on-going struggle between national majorities and Russian minorities. They are clearly also episodes which national-conservative and far-right parties can easily instrumentalise at the national level. At the international level, these conflicts over historical memory with Russia express mistrust on both sides and, particularly with the case of the *Soviet Story*, we can see how conservative-nationalist parties can make use of European institutions, in this case the Parliament, to draw the EU into these conflicts and press their case for greater support from Europe against Russian dominance. As David Galbreath and Ainius Lašas argue, this co-option of

³⁶*Soviet Story Press Kit*. Available at: <http://www.sovietstory.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/soviet-story-press-kit-march-2010.pdf> (accessed 31 October 2012).

³⁷Alexander Dyukov, 'Soviet Story' – *Forgery Tissue* (Moscow, 2008), p. 9. Available at: <http://historyfoundation.ru/dl.php?file=73> (accessed 26 November 2012).

³⁸RIA, 'Эстонское телевидение покажет документальный фильм The Soviet Story', 30 August 2009. Available at: <http://ria.ru/society/20090830/182971694.html> (accessed 26 October 2012).

³⁹BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union, 'Summary of Russian Press for Thursday 10 April 2008', April 10 2008.

⁴⁰Delfi, 'Жданок: фильм "The Soviet Story" – пропагандистская поделка', 11 April 2008. Available at <http://rus.delfi.lv/news/daily/politics/article.php?id=20714429> (accessed: 26 October 2012).

the EU to the Baltic's regional interests through the politicisation of history is not universally welcomed by other EU members, as it appears to stand in the way of developing cooperation with Russia without offering viable alternatives. In this sense, Galbreath and Lašas suggest, the Baltic state's memory politics can put them in the position of being 'policy spoilers rather than entrepreneurs'.⁴¹ The attempts on the part of the Baltic states, along with other central and eastern European states to put the crimes of communism on the EU's memory agenda as a counterweight to the western emphasis on the Holocaust can also be seen as an expression of the split within the EU over relations with Russia, dividing those member states who hope for an integration of Russia both politically and economically from those who see Russian expansionism as a threat to democracy which must be contained.⁴²

Hungary

Hungary provides a useful contrast to the situation in the Baltic states. Whereas, in the examples described above, participants in controversies over the commemoration of the communist past have sought to emphasise both its national and international dimensions, in the case of Hungary we find an example of the instrumentalisation of history in national politics which has only recently spilled over into the rhetoric of EU-Hungary relations.

The leader of the national-conservative FIDESZ party, Victor Orbán, first came to power as Prime Minister in 1998-2002, but despite the poor economic record of his rivals, the ex-communist Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), they were able to win elections in 2002 and again in 2006; even in spite of a scandal in which, before the 2006 election, the leader of the MSZP was recorded admitting he had lied about the state of the economy. As Anna Seleny points out, the MSZP's

⁴¹David Galbreath and Ainius Lašas, 'The "Baltic" Factor in EU-Russian Relations: In Search of Coherence and Co-operation in an Era of Complexity', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 19.2 (2011), 261-272 (p. 266).

⁴²Andrey Kazantsev and Richard Sakwa, 'New "Dividing Lines" in Europe: A Crisis of Trust in European-Russian Relations', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 4 (2012). Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2012.07.003> (accessed 26 October 2012).

success in comparison with other ex-communist parties in east central Europe is evidenced by its being the only one to have won two consecutive terms in office. A key element of Orbán's strategy to challenge MSZP dominance, she argues, has been to form alliances with smaller parties around a shared anti-communist agenda.⁴³

During his first term as Prime Minister, Orbán funded a museum at the 'House of Terror', a building formerly used as a prison by the security service of the Hungarian fascist Arrow Cross government, and subsequently by the secret police of the communist regime. Despite the avowed remit to represent both of these pasts, drawing parallels between them, critics have observed that the museum appears to focus disproportionately on communist crimes.⁴⁴ As James Mark observes, the site was used by Orbán for making political speeches during the 2002 election campaign, and the Prime Minister even took advantage of the occasion of the opening ceremony to remark that the museum should be seen by Hungarians as a warning against the consequences of voting for the MSZP.⁴⁵ Clearly, none of this helped Orbán win the election. What it does demonstrate, however, is that in Hungary, as opposed to the Baltic states, the mobilization of the communist past has been conditioned by the strength of the ex-communist MSZP, rather by than the country's relationship with Russia on the one hand and the EU on the other.

This constellation changed, however, with Orbán's re-election in 2010, since which his government has been in a continued state of conflict with the EU. The MSZP's handling of the economy led to a financial disaster and a bail-out by other members of the European Union in 2009. As Jan-Werner Müller notes, the MSZP, despite its socialist credentials, had become widely perceived by Hungarians as an agent of globalization and the corrupt representative of multinational

⁴³Anna Seleny, 'Communism and its Many Legacies', *Journal of Democracy*, 18.3 (2007), 56-170 (p. 159).

⁴⁴Hedvig Turai, 'Past Unmastered: Hot and Cold Memory in Hungary', *Third Text*, 23.1 (2009), 97-106 (p. 102). Sara Jones, 'Staging Battlefields: Media, Authenticity and Politics in The Museum of Communism (Prague), The House of Terror (Budapest) and Gedenkstätte Hohenschönhausen (Berlin)', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 4.1 (2011), 97-111 (p. 104).

⁴⁵Mark, p. 63.

corporations.⁴⁶ Orbán's programme, by contrast, stresses national autonomy, particularly in economic matters, and the rhetoric of his memory politics is not merely anti-communist, but also draws upon other instances of outside interference in Hungarian affairs. For example, he has established a Trianon memorial day, commemorating the reduction of Hungarian territory by that treaty by foreign powers in 1920, and has introduced new citizenship rights for those Hungarians excluded from the national territory as a consequence.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Orbán has still been able to mobilise the memory of communism by stressing its significance as a form of outside interference in Hungarian affairs, a narrative which is already present in the House of Terror museum, where National Socialism is cast in a similar light.⁴⁸ In this way, diverse historical events, including the Soviet invasion of 1956, are figured as instances of unwarranted foreign influence in Hungary's national life. The controversial new constitution which Orbán's government introduced in 2011 made explicit reference to these 'moral defeats of the twentieth century',⁴⁹ but has been perceived by the EU as incompatible with the Union's democratic standards. This comes on the heels of a climb-down in the face of European pressure over Orbán's restrictive media law of 2010, which had, for instance, attempted to criminalise journalists for 'insulting' by 'publishing adverse opinions regarding persons,' who were, one can infer, most likely to be 'persons' in power.⁵⁰ It is worth noting that this reversal came at a time when Orbán's government was reliant on EU support to help it weather the effects of the global financial crisis. Subsequently, however, Hungary has been able to manage without further EU loans,⁵¹ which has left Orbán in a stronger position to push through his constitution in March 2013, without regard to the Commission's opposition to the measures deemed to curtail civil liberties and weaken the constitutional court. Speaking in March of 2012, at a ceremony marking the Hungarian uprising against Habsburg rule in 1848, Orbán drew parallels

⁴⁶Jan-Werner Müller, 'The Hungarian Tragedy,' *Dissent*, 58.2 (2011), 5-10 (pp. 5-6).

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁸Jones, p. 104.

⁴⁹Quoted in Laura Ymayo Tartakoff, 'Religion, Nationalism, History, and Politics in Hungary's New Constitution', *Global Society*, 49 (2012), 360-366 (p. 362).

⁵⁰*Presseurop*, 'Budapest Folds on Controversial Media Law,' 17 February 2011. Available at: <http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/news-brief/506461-budapest-folds-controversial-media-law> (accessed: 12 October 2012).

⁵¹European Commission, 'Balance-of-payments Assistance to Hungary'. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/assistance_eu_ms/hungary/index_en.htm (accessed: 11 February 2014).

between that form of nineteenth century foreign rule, the Nazi and Soviet occupations, and the present behaviour of the EU:

We are more than familiar with the character of unsolicited comradely assistance, even if it comes wearing a finely tailored suit and not a uniform with shoulder patches. [...]

Hungarians will not live as foreigners dictate, will not give up their independence or their freedom, therefore they will not give up their constitution either.⁵²

What is striking about the role of the communist past in Orbán's very popular politics, I would argue, is that what began as a means of discrediting a powerful political rival and bringing together opposition political parties in a bid to challenge that rival has become, at a time of economic crisis for Hungary, a means by which the Prime Minister can present himself in a tradition of Hungarian freedom-fighters, standing up to foreign influence. Whereas there are points of comparison with the situation in the Baltic countries, it is notable that it is not contemporary Russia which serves as the bogey-man here, but rather the same EU which the Baltic states call upon to defend their independence.

Germany

The Federal Republic of Germany is clearly far from being typical of the pre-2004 EU member states of Western Europe, at least as far its memory politics are concerned. Not only was Germany the country where the Holocaust originated (even if some of its greatest crimes were committed in other countries), it is the only 'old' EU member state to incorporate territory from the former Soviet bloc: in a very real sense, the first post-Cold War enlargement of the EU took place in Germany,

⁵²Quoted in Ian Traynor, 'Hungary Prime Minister Hits Out at EU Interference in National Day Speech', *The Guardian*, 15 March 2012. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/15/hungary-prime-minister-orban-eu> (accessed 26 October 2012).

when the five new *Länder* which had previously made up the German Democratic Republic joined the Federal Republic in October 1990. From the early 1990s, the German state has sought to ‘come to terms’ with the socialist dictatorship in East Germany by funding parliamentary enquiries, museums, educational programmes, compensation schemes and a historical foundation.⁵³ Nevertheless, it is significant that this process ran in parallel with an even greater public engagement with the National Socialist past, exemplified not least by the building of a large ‘Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe’ at the heart of the re-built capital city of Berlin. Equally, and despite the best efforts of some conservative politicians and former East German dissidents, German memory policy has been at pains not to put the suffering of the victims of the Soviet occupation until 1949 and of the GDR regime until 1989 on the same footing as those of the Jews under National Socialism. Despite the official designation of the GDR as ‘the second German dictatorship’, Germany’s current ‘Federal Memorial Concept’, the closest thing Germany has to a set of national guidelines for dealing with its own history, clearly attributes to the Holocaust an ‘incomparability’ which sets it apart from and above the suffering of those persecuted by the GDR regime.⁵⁴ German memory policy walks a tight-rope between the desire not to let the crimes of communism appear insignificant in relation to the Holocaust and the fear that the necessary emphasis on such crimes may diminish the unique status of the atrocities committed by National Socialism:

All remembrance of the history of dictatorships in Germany must start from the position that one may neither relativize the crimes of National Socialism nor trivialise the injustice perpetrated by the East German dictatorship.⁵⁵

⁵³David Clarke with Ute Wölfel, ‘Remembering the German Democratic Republic in a United Germany’, in *Remembering the German Democratic Republic: Divided Memory in a United Germany*, ed. by David Clarke and Ute Wölfel (Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 3-22.

⁵⁴Deutscher Bundestag, ‘Fortschreibung der Gedenkstättenkonzeption des Bundes’ (2008), p. 2. Available at: http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/_Anlagen/BKM/2008-06-18-fortschreibung-gedenkstaettenkonzeption-barrierefrei.pdf;jsessionid=8E6392FEF904F22E9D3F9238B937C0A3.s3t1?__blob=publicationFile&v=3 (accessed 29 October 2012)

⁵⁵Ibid. My translation.

This careful compromise is, I would argue, the result of the coming together of both domestic and external factors. Firstly, the recognition of and coming to terms with the crimes of National Socialism, as well as the demonstration of contrition on the part of the Federal Republic, have been a key factor in Germany's attempt to regain trust among its neighbours, from the *Ostpolitik* of Willy Brandt to an explosion in commemoration and memorialisation in the wake of German unification. Despite some attempts by conservatives to challenge the dominance of German guilt, by the end of the 1980s, a cross-party consensus had been achieved based on a hegemonic 'culture of contrition'.⁵⁶ In the wake of German unification, Chancellor Helmut Kohl continued to reassure European neighbours, and German voters, that Germany's integration in a newly widened and deepened Europe Union was the only way to prevent a return to Germany's pre-1945 *Sonderweg*.⁵⁷ Secondly, however, perhaps the key political surprise of the post-unification period has been the resurgence of the ex-communist Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS; now renamed DIE LINKE), which was able to form coalition governments with the Social Democrats in several eastern states after unification and was even part of a red-red municipal coalition in Berlin from 2002 to 2011. Coupled with an ongoing sense of post-communist nostalgia for the good old days of full employment and a strong welfare state in the economically troubled eastern *Länder*, many conservatives feared that socialism might be making a comeback. In practical electoral terms, the rise of a fourth viable coalition party threatened to deprive the Christian Democrats of their traditional advantage in Germany's political system.⁵⁸ By emphasising links between the PDS/DIE LINKE and communist crimes, Christian Democrats and their supporters among former dissidents and victims of the regime have simultaneously sought to discredit left-wing politics more generally.

⁵⁶Lind, pp. 131 and 136.

⁵⁷Thomas Banchoff, 'German Policy towards the European Union: The Effects of Historical Memory', *German Politics*, 6.1 (1997), 60-76.

⁵⁸David Clarke, 'Compensating the Victims of Human Rights Abuses in the German Democratic Republic: The Struggle for Recognition', *German Politics*, 12.1 (2012), 17-33 (p. 23).

Nevertheless, these domestic political struggles have barely spilled over into Germany's approach to memory politics at the European level, even though Christian Democrats have led five of the seven national coalitions since German unification. Representatives of state-funded organisations which deal with the legacy of East German socialism are certainly active in European initiatives for preserving the memory of communism, such as the Platform of European Memory and Conscience and the Prague Declaration. However, this has had little effect on Germany's prioritization of Holocaust memory in the EU context. For example, a key measure put forward by the German Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2007 was the proposal of a Framework Decision which aimed to criminalise the denial of genocide and racially motivated war crimes across the Union,⁵⁹ echoing Germany's own prohibition on Holocaust denial. Finally adopted in 2008, it re-reproduced the hierarchy of Holocaust memory over memory of communism which is key to the German context:

The Framework Decision deals with such crimes as incitement to hatred and violence and publicly condoning, denying or grossly trivializing crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. The Framework Decision is limited to crimes committed on the grounds of race, colour, religion, descent and national or ethnic origin. It does not cover crimes committed on other grounds for example by totalitarian regimes. However, the Council deplores all of these crimes.⁶⁰

Consequently, and not only in the sense that the German model of 'coming to terms with the past' has been exported to other countries in Europe and beyond,⁶¹ we can fairly speak of a Germanization of European memory politics. While Germany has invested significant resources in dealing with the East German past since 1990 in the domestic context, this has not lead to a

⁵⁹Ian Traynor, 'Germany Bids to Outlaw Denial of Holocaust across Continent', *The Guardian*, 16 January 2007. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/jan/16/germany.thefarright> (accessed 30 October 2012)

⁶⁰Council of the European Union, 'Proposal for a Council Framework Decision on Combating Certain Forms and Expressions of Racism and Xenophobia by Means of Criminal Law', p. 3. Available at: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/08/st16/st16351-re01.en08.pdf> (accessed 30 October 2012)

⁶¹Troebst, p. 384.

modification of Germany's stance at the EU level. Clearly, Germany is reluctant to appear to be moving away from a Holocaust-centred memory culture when dealing with its European partners.

Conclusion

As I have shown with my three examples, it is something of an over-simplification to claim that 'old' and 'new' Europe are pitted against each other over the EU's memory politics along clearly drawn east-west battle-lines. All of the central and eastern European EU member states have certainly been supportive of a push for greater recognition of the crimes of communism at the EU level, but the differences in the meaning and function of that memory in domestic politics of individual central and eastern European member states suggest that this apparently united front can obscure the fundamentally national frame of memory politics. This anchoring of memory debates in the specificities of national politics, which Melissa Nobles has observed, for example, in the rather different context of apologies to indigenous minorities in post-colonial states,⁶² does not mean, however, that the European level becomes irrelevant. What is striking about the examples discussed above is that the shifting of memory debates from the domestic and into the European sphere changes the stakes of those debates. Broadly speaking, however intrinsic such debates may be to domestic political struggles, once governments or even individual politicians seek to bring these topics into the EU-level political discussion, they inevitably become issues of international relations, that is to say issues of relevance to the power relations between states. This is not to say that the desire to promote remembrance at the EU level cannot also be driven by a desire for domestic influence back home, potentially bolstered by the endorsement of one's agenda by EU institutions. However, by bringing their memory agenda into EU institutions, politicians and governments allow that agenda to gain a new life as a matter of international relations. The negative case of my three, Germany, also demonstrates this point: it is precisely because the Germans do not

⁶²Melissa Nobles, *The Politics of Official Apologies* (Cambridge, 2008).

want to modify their relations with other EU member states and would like to improve relations with Russia that they choose to keep debates over the communist past in East Germany within the realm of domestic politics.

Having said this, there are also apparently limits to the EU's integration of the memory of communist crimes into its memory politics. Even the resolution adopted by the European Parliament to commemorate the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, which called for an incorporation of Soviet totalitarianism into European memory, was at pains to retain a special status for the crimes of National Socialism.⁶³ This prioritization is equally evident in the Commission's report of 2010 on 'the memory of crimes committed by totalitarian regimes in Europe.' While emphasising that there can be no 'one-size-fits-all model',⁶⁴ the document notes that there is insufficient consensus on the issue of extending the Framework Decision of 2007/8 in order to include denial of crimes committed for political as opposed to racial reasons. The EU's Stockholm Programme of December 2009, already quoted above, achieves a similar inclusion and hierarchisation by placing 'crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes', vocabulary traditional associated with and indeed having their origins in the attempts to deal with the legacy of National Socialism, before 'crimes committed by totalitarian regimes' in its list of the sources of the EU's shared values; this before admitting that '[e]ach member state has its own approach to this issue'.⁶⁵

Although not explicitly stated as such, I would argue that what this amounts to is an official memory politics within the EU which allows for the expression of different national priorities in dealing with difficult pasts, stepping back somewhat from the pressure to prioritise Holocaust-

⁶³ Mark, p. 97.

⁶⁴ European Commission, p. 3.

⁶⁵ Council of the European Union, 'Proposal for a Council Framework', p. 8.

centred memory as a pre-requisite of membership. At the same time, however, there remains an implicit prioritization of Holocaust memory in the Union's stance.

As Tony Judt has pointed out, the western European experience of and relationship to communism before 1990 was of a different kind to that found in central and eastern Europe.⁶⁶ In addition, and despite attempts by some conservatives to utilise the memory of communism against the western European Left since 1990, it is the memory of the Holocaust as established in the 1970s and 1980s which has come to play a central role in the national memory politics of these western nations. For them, there is simply no need for, and certainly little domestic political capital to be extracted from an engagement with the crimes of the communist regimes of central and eastern Europe, or even with the legacies of (now largely defunct) communist parties at home. Furthermore, the 'old' member states largely do not see foreign policy advantages in promoting the memory of communism in the way that some of the 'new' member states and their politicians do. There therefore seems to be little prospect that official acknowledgement of the importance of communism for European history will translate into genuine engagement with that history in western Europe. What all of this means, ultimately, is that any EU memory politics, however inclusively formulated, will remain the vehicle of national interests, and that the divergence of these national concerns will continue to militate against any further harmonisation at the European level.

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⁶⁶Judt, p. 826.